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Wolverine World Wide Sued By Michigan Over Chemical Cleanup

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By [Alex Ebert](#)

- State alleges chemicals used to waterproof company's footwear spread to surface water, soil and groundwater
- Company says it is cooperating with cleanup

Footwear and leather giant Wolverine World Wide, Inc. is being sued to pay for continued cleanup of its defunct factory site that's allegedly releasing chemicals into groundwater and a river near Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality filed a complaint Jan. 10 in U.S. District Court alleging that perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) chemicals used to waterproof the company's footwear have spread into surface water, soil, and groundwater near the company's demolished Rockford plant site.

Michigan is asking the court to mandate a plan under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act that would require the company to pay for continued environmental investigation, cleanup, and reimbursement for the state's past and future costs due to cleanup.

In response to the suit, Wolverine issued a [statement](#) saying the company will continue to cooperate with testing and cleanup. The Environmental Protection Agency also issued a unilateral administrative [order](#) Jan. 10 for further investigation and cleanup of other chemicals at the site, such as arsenic and lead. The EPA said those chemicals have entered groundwater and "constitute a threat to public health or welfare" to residents located near two of the companies properties.

The suit is the latest move in Michigan's increased focus on monitoring and reducing PFOAs and PFOS in drinking water. The Department of Environmental Quality said the suit was only to formalize cleanup because the company has been cooperative.

"We have filed this action today because we want to ensure that immediate and long-

term solutions are confirmed by the courts,” Heidi Grether, the department’s director, said in a statement. “This action will be helpful in providing a clearly defined path forward to implement permanent solutions for the community.”

The case is Mich. Dept’ of Env’tl. Quality v. Wolverine World Wide, Inc., W.D. Mich., No. 1:18-cv-00039, 1/10/18.

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